

# BEHIND THE SCENES MAN



## LAURA DAQUINO

A DECADE ago, 33-year-old Andrew Stone never dreamed his career would twist and turn to grant him backstage passes to some of the biggest events in Australia.

Stone is the ultimate behind-the-scenes man, helping orchestrate some of Australia's largest productions since being appointed as the managing director of EPS Australia in 2012. He is also the key middle man, serving as the go-between for events personnel and construction contractors.

EPS Australia is at the forefront of infrastructure service, offering consultancy, equipment, ground protection and crowd control barriers for a diverse range of events. The company spans construction, entertainment, sport, government and military, too, with its construction and military arms based in Germany.

Its military division in particular is increasingly developing in Europe, the Middle East and Northern Africa. Stone says it comes as a surprise to some that the military requires many ancillary services that are provided by the private sector.

While military and government may seem worlds apart from sporting stars and singing sensations, Stone says a Brisbane rock concert may very well require the same types of support and infrastructure as a Middle East military base.

"The events business is purely operations and logistics management," says Stone. "The organisational component remains the same across all sectors."

"Of course you shouldn't compromise the core business or spread yourself too thin, but you can't put all your eggs in one basket either.

"It all comes down to tactful execution and exploiting business strengths properly."

Stone believes this is key to being successful in events management – adapting to the environment and maintaining an interchangeable skillset. Graduating from a Bachelor in Business Management majoring in Golf Course Management, the latter is something he quickly became acquainted with upon entering the real world.

A keen golfer, Stone worked brief stints for event promoter SFX Sports on the Australian PGA golf tour while balancing his studies, before being picked up by global sports and entertainment giant IMG in 2003. He went into an interview with IMG hoping for work experience and walked out with a full-time position.

The fast-paced lifestyle working at IMG as operations co-ordinator, together with Stone's growing interest in fast cars, drove him to take up a role as operations manager of the events management arm of V8 Supercars Australia.

Despite entering the company with minimal motorsports knowledge, Stone drew on his mantra that "organisational skills are interchangeable regardless of industry". It was a position he held for eight years during a period he refers to as the "V8 glory years".

So while the glitz and glamour of rock 'n' roll may not have lured Stone to EPS – rather it came down to the "opportunity to do international business" – there is no doubt he developed an appetite for adrenaline at the V8's that steered him in the eps direction.

Yet to even reach his own professional 'glory years', Stone has experienced more adrenaline-rushing career moments than some would in their entire lifetime.

He speaks of two defining moments - the first race of the 2009 Townsville 400 and Gurtenfestival, a music festival in the heart of the Swiss Alps.

The Townsville 400 was an event that took Stone and his team at V8 Supercars Australia five years to get its gears in motion.

"The project was always generally supported by the government, but it was such a large-scale event that it required a lot of due diligence before allocating the state budget," says Stone.

"When that starting alarm sounded and the cars began roaring, my hair stood up on my arms and I felt the biggest rush of



blood through my veins. The thought alone that we put five years of blood, sweat and tears into that event was enough to get the adrenaline racing.”

Watching Gurtenfestival, which he helped organise, was another career climax when Stone thought “this is what I get out of bed for”.

He was flown to Switzerland for a whirlwind three days to assist in the assembling of the event. It was a high-flyer moment, which Stone says are far and few between in events management, despite what many think.

As a member of the Griffith Business School Alumni Advisory Group, which is limited to 20 alumni at any given time, there is one piece of advice the wise-beyond-his-years Stone gives to students considering a career in events management.

“If you’re entering the industry to drink wine and hang out with celebrities, then events management isn’t the career for you,” says Stone.

It may seem somewhat contradictory considering Stone’s clientele, which includes Bon Jovi, Alicia Keys, Taylor Swift, Jack Johnson and Eminem this past year alone.

“I enjoy the entertainment industry and its events, but the ironic part is that I rarely get to see the actual event – the moment the act begins is the moment I take a break.”

Adding to this, Stone tells students that events management “will never be a nine-to-five”.

It’s common for him to work 30 hours one week and 100 the next.

“It’s a cyclical industry where nothing is concrete and the job description is constantly changing.”

Stone says there was a distinct lull about two years ago with international touring, and the GFC presented a challenge for the events sector too.

“It doesn’t help when the cost of doing sports and entertainment business is very high in Australia,” he says.

“It’s potentially a huge risk to bring things down here when you have a pool of five cities at most covering such an expansive region.”

However, the industry is known for its resilience, riding out economic waves and event scheduling troughs alike.

Stone also says the government is generally supportive – despite opposition to this – and contributes to smaller grassroots projects as well as major events at an above-average level on an international scale.

“Government investment into these events is often ridiculed because people can’t see the direct benefits of an event,” says Stone. “However, quality events are a large part of why people decide to live in a community.”

Stone admits he is biased, but still firmly maintains that events are at the foundation of a strong community, and a strong community in turn will host great events.

Despite his thirst for international business, he believes south-east Queensland has all the ingredients to become a major destination on the international circuit.

“Like all good things, it will take time, and it has some challenges to overcome – but eventually it will be up there.”



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